

*I could pretend I'm less alone*, Ontario poet Mike Madill writes in his first poetry collection, *The Better Part of Some Time*, but the acknowledgement that it would be a pretense is what sets Madill's writing apart from others who might tackle similar subject matter, such as a father's death and the repercussions of unfinished grief. He loved his father with a fierceness that a lesser writer might embellish with some serious sentimentality, but Madill's poems are clean and thorough; he writes with a chisel on hard rock, sparks flying madly around the room. Believe me, these poems are invigorating and courageous, totally attentive to language and lyric, and imbued with an honesty that is often stunning. They remind us that being human isn't a multiple choice question.

Barry Dempster, author of 16 collections of poetry, twice nominated for the Governor General's Award.